



DECISION MEMO

Wildfire Tree Planting – Forestwide



USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests
Clearwater, Idaho and Latah Counties, Idaho

I. Background

The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests is proposing to plant conifer seedlings where burn severity (current or future) has resulted in very little forest vegetation remaining.

II. Purpose and Need

Relying on natural regeneration in the burned areas would result in stands dominated primarily by grand fir and Douglas fir, species susceptible to root disease and stem decay, and likely to have low survival rates. The species to be planted – ponderosa pine, Western larch, and Western white pine – are more resistant to root disease and stem decay which will reduce pest problems across the Forests. These shade intolerant species also tend to be more fire resistant, relatively drought-tolerant and longer lived than shade tolerant species. Douglas-fir, Engelmann Spruce, lodgepole pine and Western red cedar will be considered for planting, if/where they are appropriate for the site.

The purpose of the project is to restore the affected watersheds by stabilizing soils, reducing erosion, and restoring hydrologic function, and to reestablish and promote the diversity of the forested component in the burned areas. In turn, this would improve the overall health, structure and vigor of the forest within the larger wildfire-impacted landscape over the long term.

The project is needed to meet the requirements of NFMA: *"All forested lands in the National Forest System shall be maintained in appropriate forest cover with species of trees, degree of stocking, rate of growth, and conditions of stand designed to secure maximum benefits of multiple use sustained yield management in accordance with land management plans"*.

Decision

I have decided to approve the Wildfire Tree Planting – Forestwide project with the following terms and conditions.

The project will plant ponderosa pine, Western larch, and Western white pine seedlings in various locations throughout the Forests in stands/areas where timber management activities are allowed and reforestation treatments are required. Individual units to be planted will be determined as needed. The majority of the planting will be accomplished by a contract crew with oversight by Forest Service personnel.

Experienced silviculture staff will evaluate each site and design planting prescriptions specifying species, spacing, and amounts to be planted. Site prescriptions will consider appropriate species composition based on aspect, elevation, microsites, site potential, natural fire regime, etc.

All planting will be done by hand using hoedads, planting shovels, dibble bars, etc. There are no ground disturbing activities associated with the project. Only existing roads will be used to access the sites. Driving full-sized vehicles on roads during wet conditions will be minimized to reduce damage to roads. Access by All-Terrain Vehicles or walking will be used instead.

Surveys will be conducted after the first and third growing seasons to monitor the survival and condition of the planted trees.

Project Implementation: Planting activities will be conducted during the spring and fall of the year, with the total for any one year not to exceed 4,200 acres.

Design Criteria include, but are not limited to:

- No roads or landings will be constructed.
- Use of motorized equipment (such as All Terrain Vehicles), other than hand held equipment such as power saws, will not be permitted off designated roads in the project areas.
- Experienced Silviculture personnel will be involved in designing vegetative treatments.
- If Specialists (Wildlife Biologist, Botanist, Archaeologist, etc.) determine there are areas where tree planting should not occur, the site(s) will be removed from planting.

III. Rationale for Decision and Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

Based on information in this document and the project record, I have determined this project is not significant in either context or intensity (40 CFR 1508.27), that no extraordinary circumstances affecting resource conditions exist (36 CFR 220.6), that this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS, and that it meets all the criteria outlined in 36 CFR 220.6(d)(11): *Post-fire rehabilitation activities, not to exceed 4,200 acres (such as tree planting, fence replacement, habitat restoration...), to repair or improve lands unlikely to recover to a management approved condition from wildland fire damage, or to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire.*

The rationale for my decision is based on: (1) the proposed action fully meeting the criteria for Categorical Exclusions, (2) the proposed action meeting the purpose and need, (3) the findings related to extraordinary circumstances, (4) the project's consistency with laws and regulations, and (5) the on-the-ground review and discussion with Resource Specialists.

Finding of the Absence of Extraordinary Circumstances to Resource Conditions

Based on the findings for resource conditions described below, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances are associated with my decision. Forest Service direction at 36 CFR 220.6(b) describes the resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstance related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA.

Additionally, 36 CFR 220.6(b) states, “*The mere presence of one of more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the existence of a cause-effect relationship between a proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions and if such a relationship exists, the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist.*”

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat or Forest Service sensitive species.

The Forest Interdisciplinary (ID) Team Wildlife Biologist, Fisheries Biologist and Botanist have determined the project would have no significant effects to federally listed and R1 Sensitive wildlife, fish and plant species and/or their habitats. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified for these resources.

2. Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.

The Forest Hydrologist determined no significant effects to floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds are expected for this project. The project is consistent with all applicable State and Federal water quality laws, and with soil and water standards in the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forest Plans, including the PACFISH amendment. Based on this analysis, no extraordinary circumstances were identified regarding floodplains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds.

3. Congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas or National Recreation Areas.

The project area is not located in any congressionally designated area and, therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

4. Inventoried Roadless areas or potential wilderness areas.

The project area is not located in an inventoried roadless area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to this resource.

5. Research Natural Areas.

The proposed activities are not within or adjacent to any Research Natural Areas.

6. American Indians and Alaska native religious or cultural sites.

The Forest Cultural Resources Specialist determined the project has little likelihood to adversely affect cultural properties, assuming such properties were present. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to native religious or cultural sites.

7. Archaeological sites or historical properties or areas.

The Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, or the Forest Archaeologist via the use of the North Idaho Programmatic Agreement, has determined that no archaeological or historic property will be adversely affected by this project. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

IV. Interested and Affected Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Contacted

The proposed action – hand-planting trees in severely burned areas – is considered limited in context and intensity, and therefore scoping was conducted internally on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. The Small NEPA Interdisciplinary Team was scoped on November 16, 2017 with no significant effects or extraordinary circumstances identified.

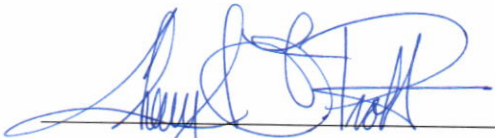
V. Findings Required by other Laws

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project, I find that the Wildfire Tree Planting – Forestwide Project is consistent with applicable Federal, state and local laws and regulations, including management area direction and the standards and guidelines contained in the 1987 Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forest Plans, as amended, as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

VI. Contact Person

Questions regarding this decision should be sent to Jeff Chynoweth, Small NEPA Team Planner, c/o Nez Perce – Clearwater Supervisor's Office, 903 Third Street, Kamiah, Idaho 83536 or by telephone to (208) 935-4260 or FAX at (208) 935-4275 during business hours (M-F, excluding Federal holidays, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., PST).

VII. Signature of Deciding Officer



CHERYL F. PROBERT
Forest Supervisor
Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests

12-14-17

Date

cc: Clare Brick

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